

time of the year, but it is also the turning point when the sun begins to shine more and more each day.

Together we offer our wish, our hope, and our prayers that the dreams that have carried us so far of peace on Earth, good will toward all may yet still come true.

#### THANKING STAFF

Before I yield the floor, I would like to take the opportunity to acknowledge the individuals in my now second year here in the Senate whom I have seen work incredibly hard, but very rarely get acknowledged, all of those who help us as we preside: the clerks, who keep all of the documentation that comes before the Senate moving; the Parliamentarians, who try to keep us in some degree of order as we move along the way; the party secretaries and their staffs, who do such a great job on informing us as to what is happening and to try to keep somewhat of a schedule in terms of our lives here in the Senate; to those in the cloakroom who also produce that service; to the pages who have done a great job.

It was a privilege to have the opportunity to talk to so many of them. I think they are going to carry their experiences here with them a lifetime, and I am sure that maybe we will see some of them in this Chamber in the future.

To all of those who make this institution the greatest democratic institution in the world operate the way it successfully operates, my deepest thanks, my best for the holiday season.

With that, I yield the floor.

#### ORDER OF PROCEDURE

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska.

Mr. LEVIN. Would the Senator from Alaska yield for a unanimous consent request?

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Yes.

Mr. LEVIN. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that after the Senator from Alaska finishes, I understand the Senator from Pennsylvania would be recognized. I would then ask that I be the next Democrat to be recognized.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### RECOGNIZING SENATE PAGES

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Madam President, I want to follow on the comments of my colleague from New Jersey in recognizing those who allow this body to function so efficiently and to also give special recognition to the pages.

Given the schedule they have, we are likely not going to be seeing much more of this particular group as they finish up for the holidays and their exams, and then move back to their respective States and their communities. But to all of you who have given so much to so many of us, to make our jobs a little bit easier, we thank you. Thank you very greatly. I believe this

is an episode in your life that you will long remember, and hopefully it will be a good and positive experience for all of you. Thank you for your contribution.

#### WELCOMING RETURNING TROOPS

Madam President, I note that in my hometown of Anchorage, AK, this afternoon, there is a wonderful celebration taking place. The 495th out of Fort Richardson has all come home. They have come home after 15 months being over in Iraq, doing incredible work under incredibly difficult situations.

We mourn the loss of those who are not home, who will not be home. But today in Anchorage, the community is coming together to say: Welcome back. Please let us know how we can support you and your families, not only at this holiday season, but throughout the year, and support you for all the support you have given us.

We take time during the holiday season to show our thanks, to show our appreciation to so many. But I wish to recognize the soldiers and the veterans from Alaska, from throughout the whole country, who have given so much and who continue to give so much. We want them to know their sacrifices in serving us, whether it be in Afghanistan or in Iraq, have not gone unnoticed. Their sacrifices have certainly not gone unnoticed by my fellow Alaskans.

When I was in Iraq earlier in the year, I had the pleasure of meeting with soldiers and guardsmen from Anchorage, Fairbanks, Seward, Soldotna, Eagle River, Slana, and Wasilla, all over the State. In hearing their stories and their commitment, you cannot help but feel proud as an American. I was certainly proud as an Alaskan. Every day I have Alaskans who write my office to praise the servicemen and the servicewomen who have returned and those who are still in combat. Sometimes it is a quick e-mail, saying: I support all of those who are serving, and other times they are very long, heartfelt letters praising our heroes and truly expressing a solidarity with them for the sacrifice they have made.

The fact that Alaska has the largest number of veterans per capita, I think says a lot about our State's character. Our Alaska veterans are some of the most exemplary in the Armed Forces. The 172nd Stryker Brigade out of Fairbanks was on tour in Iraq, and they were extended to 16 months. But when they were asked to give more, they remained strong, they remained proud. Last week, I received an e-mail from the former commander of the 172nd, and he sent along an article of an Iraqi, a young Iraqi girl who had been blind. Some of the soldiers in the 172nd had helped facilitate this young girl coming to the United States for eye surgery. This young child, this beautiful little Iraqi girl, is now able to see. She was given that gift of sight because of the caring and compassion of these soldiers.

Another story was shared with me by the former commander. He noted that on December 12, SGT Gregory Williams from the 172nd was presented with the Distinguished Service Cross, the second highest award for valor, for his actions while in combat in Baghdad. Despite being injured himself when their vehicle was struck by a bomb, Sergeant Williams was able to return fire and help a wounded comrade to safety. To date, there have only been eight Distinguished Service Crosses awarded since the war began in 2001. So we are very proud of SGT Gregory Williams.

We say that we do things a little bit differently in Alaska. We enjoy doing things a little differently. There was one Alaskan marine who was over in Iraq. He discovered that he had some hidden talents he did not imagine. His innovative approach to searching out insurgents earned him a Marine Corps Commendation Medal. SGT Aaron A. Henahan led his squad to search out and detain 18 black list or high-value insurgents while in his third tour in Iraq. He is an adventurous young man. Sergeant Henahan was barely out of high school and was anxious to see the world when he first thought of signing up to serve his country. September 11 and the outbreak of war did not cause his decision to waiver an inch.

Sergeant Henahan deployed in April of 2003 and spent his first tour in the town of Babylon. He served his country well. Like many who fought alongside him, he began to learn the undercurrents, the inner workings of Iraqi society. He returned for a second tour to Husaybah, near Iraq's border with Syria in August of 2004. At that time Husaybah was a dangerous town.

Sergeant Henahan served his second tour in Iraq with distinction, but still he felt he needed to do more. Before deploying for his third and final tour in February of 2006, he told his friends and his family back home that he wanted to make a difference in Iraq, a sentiment many American soldiers and guardsmen share. He spent a lot of time between his second and his third tours thinking about what he might be able to do differently, how he could learn from his experiences in the two deployments prior, and how he might be able to achieve a better result.

Combining his Marine training with information he learned from a retired Los Angeles police officer who was deployed to Iraq to teach the troops urban tactics, Sergeant Henahan approached his third tour with what he referred to as a beat cop mentality. He wanted to approach the problem of rounding up insurgents as if he were a native of the area. He spent his free time studying the tribal history and the geography of Husaybah for hours at a time. The ability to put his plan in motion, Sergeant Henahan says, was made possible in part by Operation Steel Curtain, which had cleared Husaybah block by block, and set up outposts called "firm bases" throughout the city.